

Women At Warp – Episode 85 – Using Trek to Teach Empathy

[WAW intro plays]

Grace: Hi and welcome to Women at Warp: A Roddenberry Star Trek Podcast. Join us as our crew of four women Star Trek fans boldly go on our biweekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name is Grace and thanks for tuning in. With us today we've got Sue.

Sue: Hi everybody!

Grace: And we've got Jarrah.

Jarrah: I am also here.

[laughter]

Grace: Now, before we get into our main topic, we've got a little bit of housekeeping to do first. First off, our show is entirely supported by our patrons on Patreon. If you'd like to become a patron you can do so for as little as a dollar a month and get awesome rewards. Addendum: we get to decide what awesome means. Our rewards, our rules. [laughter] From thanks on social media, up to silly watch along commentaries. Visit us at www.patreon.com/womenatwarp. You can also support us just by leaving a rating or review on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, or wherever you get your podcast. Just give us the traffic and let us know that you're listening.

Sue: As a reminder, our next Book Club pick is *Articles of the Federation* by Keith DeCandido. So, if you'd like to join us for that episode, you can pick up that book and read along with us and find the Book Club group on Goodreads.

Jarrah: Well, you go to Goodreads and you have to search Women at Warp under "groups."

Sue: There you go!

Grace: And then you'll see us at the other end of that Reading Rainbow.

Jarrah: [singing to the tune of the Reading Rainbow theme song] Butterfly in the sky...

Grace: [joins singing] Shuttlecraft twice as high!

Jarrah: [continues] Take a look.

Sue: [sings] It's on a pad. Reading Rainbow! [chuckles] Okay, that happened.

Jarrah: Yep.

Grace: So, our main topic today was suggested by our listener Jody and she wanted us to talk about the best episodes for teaching empathy. Now, how do we define empathy?

Jarrah: Well, empathy is basically the experience of understanding another person's thoughts, feelings, and condition from their point of view, rather than from your own, simply put. And we had a request on Twitter to distinguish that from sympathy.

Sue: Yeah, so, sympathy is more about feeling bad for someone and their situation or their misfortune.

Grace: So, it's more quality of pity, rather than just being able to feel what they're feeling.

Sue: Right. So, empathy is more about understanding someone's views who's different from your own and sympathy is about feeling bad for someone.

Jarrah: And why I think this makes a good topic for our show is that empathy, in addition to just being a nice thing, is, I think, essential for recognizing and addressing the suffering of marginalized groups, as well as individuals that we care about.

Grace: Oh, absolutely! And we've had a lot of people who have listened to the show and not really considered a lot of the topics we are talking about being like, "Oh, I never really thought about this thing that didn't relate to me and now I'm having to go back and re-watch this with that empathy," thinking, "Oh, I guess it would be different if it wasn't me."

Jarrah: Yeah, Absolutely.

Sue: Well, and that's the importance of different perspectives when we're talking about something that seems as frivolous as, you know, popular culture. But these episodes were meant to teach us things and empathy being one of them, but then when we gain that empathy, we're able to learn things about other cultures and other societies and other ways of life.

Grace: And that's what communication is all about, isn't it? At its core?

Jarrah: Yeah, for sure. And I found a definition by Theresa Wiseman who talked about the qualities of empathy, if we want to break it down a little further, and said that in her view, "empathy consists of perspective taking." So, (one) Take the perspective of another person. Two: stay out of judgement, which I think is super important. Three: recognizing emotion in other people. And then four is: communicating that. And I think that's really important to lay it out like that because, I mean, I think maybe a good example would be when people try to approach people they care about with, say, depression and the whole like, "All you need to do is go out and take a walk." [Sue makes a noise of disgust] That would not—that would be sympathy. I mean obviously, it's someone who cares about someone, but that really is not staying out of judgment and then recognizing their perspective as their truth. And so, empathy should ideally turn into taking action that is in line with that person's truth.

Grace: Know your truth and accept the truths of others.

Jarrah: Yeah, so, you know if people are like, "What would just help me right now is for you to listen," then that is a good thing to do.

Grace: Yeah, it's really weird how some people don't really understand that a lot of empathy is just being able to say, "I hear what you're saying."

Jarrah: Yeah, I think empathy is equal, sympathy is placing the other person below you, in a way.

Sue: Yes!

Grace: Yeah.

Jarrah: All right. Well, shall we start going through with a few episodes we picked?

Sue: Yeah and I think it's important to note that we were specifically looking for episodes that teach us empathy rather than ones that just show empathy, which is kind of a fuzzy line, but hopefully it will come across as we talk about these episodes.

Jarrah: For sure, because we had so much suggestions and feedback from listeners, which is awesome, and one of the ways we decided to sort of pare down, in addition to just picking some episodes that are maybe, you know, more watchable episodes, [laughter] but also ones that maybe take the audience along for the journey of discovering empathy, versus presenting a very easily empathetic situation to begin with. Maybe before we get started, can I mention that I did not see a lot of Troi episodes on this list. [laughs]

Grace: Surprising, you know, considering the Goddess of Empathy. [laughter] Should we have a little empathy for her on that stance?

Jarrah: Oh man, empathy for Marina Sirtis.

Grace: We have no shortage of it.

Sue: They took the word 'empathy' and twisted it to give her her super power, right? So, her knowing what someone else's emotions are, that's not really empathy.

Jarrah: It's like the first stage. It's identification, but she—

Grace: It's a definition of empathy, but it's probably not the best one.

Jarrah: —and a lot of times she uses it to... Well, first of all, it's not often actually the focus of her episodes.

Sue: No.

Jarrah: A lot of times, when she does use her empathy, it's like, "I sense that they're lying," which is not really the sense that we're talking about, where you would identify with someone to, you know, better ally with them. So, yeah.

Grace: [whispers dramatically] Empathy.

[laughter]

Jarrah: Yeah, I mean if I was going to put one Counselor Troi episode on the list I was gonna put *Dark Page*, which is about her empathy with her mother. Although, a lot of these episodes, I'm sure this will come up as a theme, that there is a bit of an issue or a possible debate to be had about situations where empathy is kind of forced on someone.

Grace: You can be strong-arming someone emotionally and have it not be actual empathy.

Jarrah: Yeah, but I mean, I think in this case she's uncovering a secret, that her mother doesn't want to share, for her mother's own good. So, you know, it wasn't necessarily Lwaxana's wishes, although she is grateful at the end of the day. But I think for me, that's a really powerful episode because I know that someone I definitely need to try and have more empathy for is my mom, on a pretty regular basis. So, trying to recognize that my

mom has been through a lot. And even though she can sometimes feel like my Lwaxana Troi [laughs], I need to more understand where she's coming from.

Sue: Okay, so, when we started talking about this topic, the very first episode that came to mind for me was *Devil in the Dark*.

Grace: Yes. There's a very good episode.

Sue: For anyone who doesn't remember, this is the moment the Horta and it's sort of the classic like sci fi/horror trope of, "Oh no, it turns out that we're really the monster!"

[Grace makes a classic Sting sound effect]

Jarrah: [imitating Horta's voice] No kill !!

Grace: No kill !!

Sue: But it just, it really is just so classic in that as soon as the crew has their perspective shift, they realize what's going on and they realize that all this is, is a mother trying to protect her young. And as soon as they do that, they're trying to help her do it. As soon as they have that epiphany.

Grace: Yes.

Jarrah: Yeah, this episode came up a couple times in the suggestions from Duncan and Melina. A lot of episodes were suggested by multiple people so, we will try and list as many as we recorded. And yeah it was one that came to my mind too because it's such an early example of looking beyond the initial impulse to be afraid of something you don't understand. Do you want to pick one next, Grace?

Grace: Well, the one that I always want to go back to is *Duet*. And it was one that I know multiple people wanted to talk about and it's just such—I always go back to this episode. It's no secret it's one of my favorites. And I think it's one of the most, kind of, important ones when you're talking about **Deep Space Nine** as having a lot of real world analogies for the aftermath of World War II and also just **Deep Space Nine** establishing itself in its first season as digging a little darker than a lot of the other **Star Trek** iterations. And for those of you who don't remember it's the one where Kira has a Cardassian show up on the station and she realizes, "Oh, this guy's a war criminal who killed a bunch of Bajorans." [dramatically] Or is he? Anyway, it's one of the ones where I think, right off the bat, you empathize with one character and you don't have sympathy for the other character by the end. But you also have empathy for them.

And it really does force the viewer into an uncomfortable situation for having empathy for both sides. And I think that's really important, especially when you're talking about, not so much two sides of an oppressed party, because there's always an oppressor and an oppressee, but the act of being complicit and sometimes how that is not a role that people just kind of fall into. Sometimes that is forced, which is really uncomfortable to think about and being uncomfortable is really kind of one of the main structural tenets of empathy, in a way. So, it's an uncomfortable episode, but an important one. [laughs] Did any of that make sense?

Jarrah: Absolutely. Yeah and I like how you brought up the power dynamic, because I think that complicates it for me in what, I think, is a good way, when thinking about this teaching empathy. Because it isn't like, for example, in *Let That Be Your Last Battlefield*, where the two sides are presented as sort of roughly, equally guilty. That both of them just kind of irrationally hate each other. There is some dialogue that sort of lends one side more than the other, but that's kind of erased by the end when they're just chasing each other around

trying to kill each other. So, that one you're dealing with, you know, trying to get them to understand each other on an equal playing field level. And then in *Duet* it's really complicated by that power dynamic and the assumed power dynamic at the beginning, but then when you find out Marritza is not this gul that killed a whole bunch of people in horrible ways, but was just a file clerk. How does that change the view?

Grace: Who was still wracked by guilt for being complicit with that, even though he was culturally forced into it.

Jarrah: For sure. Yeah, but also realizes he doesn't necessarily deserve to be let off the hook, but it's complicated. You know, Kira is someone who was 100% on the oppressed side here and then she's the one who has to develop empathy more towards the end of the thing, because he's already gone through that process.

Grace: Again, it's just, emotionally, such a complicated episode. And that's an important thing about empathy. It can be very complicated.

Jarrah: Yeah, Karen said, "Kira comes full circle by the end of this episode and has so much more empathy than she did. And certainly, the entire story is driven by Marritza's empathy." I think that's true. He saw the suffering of the Bajorans and he just couldn't look away.

Grace: Which is harsh. You hear—I'm gonna take this darker again for a minute—you hear a lot of stories post World War II about the people of Poland kind of being forced into a situation where they were watching war crimes being committed in their backyards and they were in no position to do anything about it, except for just kind of watch it happen. And then, both culturally and personally, live with that guilt for decades down the line. My sister was part of the March of the Living Tour, which takes you throughout the concentration camps in Poland and then to Israel, and one of the things that still just kind of makes her blood run cold about it to this day, is speaking with this old homeless man who kind of went crazy based on the fact that he was like, "We saw the factories. We saw the smoke. We could smell what it was that was making the smoke, but we couldn't do anything. We just had to keep going on with our lives and pretending that we weren't smelling corpses being burned during the day." Just horrifying. Did I make it too dark?

[slightly uncomfortable laughter]

Jarrah: No, I mean that's what the episode is about. So.

Sue: Yeah.

Jarrah: And I think it can be a really good companion to those kinds of discussions and the sort of complicated realities we live with after atrocities, where you have people trying to—who were on the oppressing side—trying to reconcile, but I think that you know, without a gesture like Marritza had, then you know there's limits, in some ways, to what we can accomplish.

Grace: Let's move on to another pick.

Jarrah: Okay, well, I mean to go back to the empathy versus sympathy distinction, I will say that in addition to not a lot of *Troi* episodes being suggested, we also had very few **Enterprise** episodes, which is to say one [laughter] suggested. It was a decent suggestion, which is Mike on Twitter had suggested including *Observer Effect* and this is the one where it starts out where Travis and Reed are being possessed by non-corporeal lifeforms who have introduced a virus and it's infected Trip and Hoshi and they're in quarantine. And the non-corporeal beings, it's basically their job to infect people with this virus and see how they react. And we find

out at the end of it that they are the Organians so, tie in to **The Original Series**. And they're kind of jerks. They're really quite jerks.

Grace: [laughs] Yeah possessing people is kind of a dick move across the board.

Jarrah: Yeah. And I would say in this one, you know I don't think it totally meets our test about teaching empathy, because obviously we empathize with the people who are humans dying of this horrible virus. But I think that at the end it has an interesting lesson about sympathy versus empathy because these aliens go through watching this whole thing go down and they're supposed to be scientists just neutrally observing, but the one who's inhabiting Travis is developing a sense of ethics and feeling like this isn't really fair especially when the virus—

Grace: Picked a hell of a time for it, too.

Jarrah: —yeah, breaks out of the quarantine and it's going to kill everyone on the ship. And especially when they spend some time in the bodies of Trip and Hoshi while they're sick and actually feel what it's like to feel that pain. And one of them still is like, "No. Can't do anything. We're observers here. We're just going to watch you die and we're totally justified because we're scientists." But at the end of the day the other one who is empathizing with them and not just sympathizing with them says, "No, this isn't cool. We can do better than this. I'm going to save them and then we're going to go back to our planet and we are going to submit a request that this whole thing be updated because these people have proven that they are super intelligent." So, it was kind of an interesting ending, I thought. Plus, some decent Hoshi moments.

Grace: Yeah.

Sue: This episode has always also reminded me of the **Next Gen** episode *Allegiance*. In that case the crew was not possessed, but Picard is abducted and these outside observers are studying how different aliens are reacting to confinement. And all they care about is the behavioral aspect of things, without taking into account their emotional states, right? So, they're studying the causes of this distress but without understanding it, until, you know, Picard then sort of does it to them, which you know you can argue that it's not quite ethical in the "eye for an eye" sense. [laughs] But I think it's interesting to think about these two episodes together and how on **Voyager** you saw someone developing this sense of empathy and it took something similar actually happening to the aliens on **Next Gen** for them to understand at all, or even begin to understand. So, I'm going to come out of left field a little bit and talk about *Ethics*.

Jarrah: Okay.

Sue: We have the situation with Worf and Crusher and Dr. Russell about treatment. I think what can be taken from this, after Worf breaks his back and the treatment that Crusher wants to do has the greatest chance of him regaining most of his abilities back and living a longer life. And Russell's treatment could possibly restore him completely. But it's a much smaller chance, and it's unproven, and I think we see here a dichotomy between Russell trying to get her procedure approved, get her paper published, and get this notoriety and fast track what she describes as medical science. Whereas, Crusher's real goal is the well-being of her patient. So, I think we see Crusher caring about Worf and empathizing with that situation, whereas, we see Russell not at all.

Jarrah: Yeah, I mean, I think that that makes sense, although, I mean I'm sure Russell would argue, "Well, I'm the one who's listening to what Worf's actually saying he wants." But, I mean, it's hard when you're in a physician/patient relationship because there's inherently a power dynamic there, too.

Sue: That's true.

Jarrah: Want to throw one in there, Grace?

Grace: I do. I want to absolutely go for *The Measure of a Man*, which I think we both had Andi and various listeners suggest and it's a really good episode. For those of you who don't remember it's the one pretty much where they are having to defend in a court Data's autonomy and whether or not he actually is property of Starfleet, or whether he counts as an independent living entity, which on one hand requires—and I feel like this is one of the hardest parts of the episode to watch—the fact that as a member of Starfleet, Riker gets pulled in to defend Starfleet's position that Data is pretty much a piece of property that belongs to Starfleet and him just having to be like, "I am so sorry. I am only doing this out of my duty to Starfleet." It's pretty intense.

But we also get, I think, what is one of—I wouldn't want to call it a scary scene, but it is the most probably the most jarring scenes I've ever seen in Star Trek—is the point where Riker is having to go on the stand and say, "This person. This person who is a friend of mine and who I have been friends with for years, is a machine. Let me break it down to you why on paper he is absolutely machine." And it's very intense and it culminates with him pretty much just reaching over and shutting Data off so he falls over onto the table. And that is just such an intense moment, both in the fact that Data has been exploited here. And we all have empathy for Data because we've seen him for all of these years and we've seen him trying to grow and that one of the core parts of Data's entire arc of the series is trying to empathize with other people. And the fact that no matter how much he grows as a person, there will still be this on-paper definition of him as property and not a person.

And I'm going to put some cards on the table here, as someone who is on the autism spectrum, the idea of working your ass off trying to empathize with other people and trying to get on that same level with them and you know that there will be this brick wall emotionally between you and just about everyone else you'll meet, is so hard and it is [sighs] trying. And going forward every day and knowing that that will be there, is such a battle. And knowing that there are people who you trust with that knowledge, but who still know their ways where they can make you just fall flat like Data on the table is so scary.

Sue: Mmhmm.

Grace: And it is just that that part really hits. Just the fact that trying to empathize in and of itself can be such a challenge. And the fact that no matter what you do there will be people who will not empathize with you is very scary.

Jarrah: Mmhmm. Thanks, Grace.

Grace: That's a scene that just has always... the first time I saw it I think I was like 14 or 15 and it just chilled me to the f—king bone.

Sue: It's absolutely gut wrenching.

Grace: But yeah, it does really force us to remember that empathizing is hard and it is different for other people and as this episode really proves to us, we can empathize with people who are different, but we have to remember that sometimes there are people who are different, where empathizing the way it works for other people is not the same.

Jarrah: Mmhmm.

Sue: Yeah and I have said it before and I will say it as many times I have to: that's why I wish that Pulaski had had a bigger role in this episode.

Grace: Absolutely.

Sue: Over her season we see her go from thinking that. Thinking that Data is just a thing, to considering him a friend.

Grace: Again, there was just so much missed potential there, especially with the work that throughout the progression of the series we see Data putting into trying to connect with other people around him and Pulaski is kind of writing that off as, "Well, that's just not going to happen. Why bother?" I feel like there was a lot of analogy that could be drawn there that wasn't.

Jarrah: I think that the ending of that episode is really important, as well as the parts where Picard's making the case and pointing out that Data has friends, Data has people who care about him. And even though he's partly a machine and doesn't technically have emotions, that he has these relationships and connections, just like anyone else.

Grace: Sometimes the people that you have around you and the connections that you can make, no matter what kind they are, are the thing that ground you and they keep you functioning.

Jarrah: Mmhm. I think that Data has a couple episodes like that and there are definitely more **Trek** episodes that question the sentience of machines and one that I was actually looking at was suggested by Will, which is the **Voyager** episode *Flesh and Blood* and this is the one where the Hirogen call them because they say that the holograms they've given the Hirogen after *The Killing Game* have malfunctioned and are just mercilessly killing the Hirogen. But when The Doctor starts spending time with the holograms, he finds that they have exceeded their programming in line with him, and are actually just sort of fighting for their freedom. Although, they are mixed in their ability to overcome their original programming to be warriors. And it's a really interesting episode and honestly, I think Janeway way comes off not so great.

Grace: Uh... yeah!

Jarrah: Yeah, she's just like, "Sorry, Doctor, we have to help the Hirogen. I'm not going to piss them off. These guys, they're holograms. We can't trust them. We'll, you know, we'll store them all." But, of course, you can't blame them for not trusting Voyager, who gave them to the Hirogen in the first place. But I think that where the episode really shines is this stuff between B'Elanna and one of the holograms, who is a Cardassian woman and B'Elanna talks to her about how, you know, even just seeing her as a Cardassian she has trouble working with her because she has stereotypes about her. And the Cardassian hologram has stereotypes about B'Elanna as a Klingon that B'Elanna is like, "Well, that's not true about me. I'm recognizing that the stuff is not true about you, that I'm expecting."

Grace: I love how in this situation you literally cannot deprogram inherent racism.

Jarrah: But she kind of does because the woman ends up saving B'Elanna and The Doctor and partly because her and B'Elanna bond over being engineers.

Grace: Yay, STEM buddies!

Jarrah: Yeah and where like their leader is this sort of, messiah complex megalomaniac Bajoran hologram who just wants to kill anyone who disagrees with him, B'Elanna and this woman sort of agree and come to an understanding between themselves, that if you know, you want to build a society, engineers are more important

than warriors and that if you recognize the value in someone else, it's more likely they're going to recognize value in you.

Grace: One thing that I like about this episode, and if I can segue into another discussion of another episode, the **Voyager** episode *Author, Author*, I want to say that's what it's called. But I like both of these because we get to see The Doctor in a position where he has to address the fact that he is around a lot of people who aren't capable of empathizing with some of what he's going through and sometimes he will be in a situation where he is the only one capable of empathizing with another party, as a hologram. And I think that that comes across so importantly in *Author, Author*.

Jarrah: Yeah, Photons Be Free.

Grace: Yes. The one where The Doctor decides he's going to write a book about the struggle of being a hologram and the crew initially doesn't really like it, because it doesn't paint them in the best light and then they have to address the fact that it doesn't paint us in the best light, but also holograms don't get the best treatment and The Doctor knows that. And he isn't treated horribly here, but he knows that for a lot of other holograms it's way worse. And then they find out that the book is going to be edited without his consent and change it around and it ends up becoming a whole matter of, "Well, no because this is a symbol of a group's oppression. And that's kind of more important than our personal comfort." That's being addressed.

Sue: I think the whole "holographic rights" storyline they went through on **Voyager** was really interesting. I think in some places it could have been executed a little bit better. [laughs]

Grace: Oh, absolutely.

Sue: You know, we have Data, who we sort of look at as a marginalized individual in a lot of ways and people identify with on that level, but we really see this marginalized group when The Doctor starts writing for holographic rights and we see all those Mark I Medical holograms working in a mine.

Grace: That final scene though is just so pitch perfect. The very thing of all the Mark I's having to work and toil away in the mines and one of them leaning to another and going, "Have you heard of *Photons Be Free* it's stirring stuff!"

Sue: Yeah, but we know what they are capable of because of The Doctor.

Grace: Exactly. Yes.

Sue: And that's what makes that so horrifying, really.

Grace: Also, I think one of the important things in the episode is the crew realizing, "Our personal discomfort or being worried that we're going to look kind of like shmucks means a lot less than giving this"—I want to say creative outlet, more or less. No, not quite—"putting this story into the world will mean more for this group of people. And that matters beyond our personal discomfort."

Sue: Well, and you would like to think too, that some of them went, "Well, if The Doctor's perceiving us this way (maybe we should) change our behavior."

Grace: Yes. Can you empathize with that?

Sue: Mmhmm! I mean I don't think we could do this episode without talking about *I, Borg*.

Grace: Oh, of course not.

Sue: So, this is the Hugh episode where they find the damaged Borg on this planet, bring them back, and heal them, in a way and—or him, Hugh—give him a name, sort of help him discover himself as an individual. And then have the whole fight about well, “We could implant a virus and send him back to the continuum to destroy the Borg.”

Grace: But it would possibly destroy Hugh in the process, right?

Sue: Definitely. And also, it's genocide.

Grace: Yeah, genocide not great usually.

Sue: [laughs] Right.

Grace: It's frowned upon.

Sue: But the crew also is beginning to see—how do I put it? In Hugh they're able to visualize...

Jarah: An autonomous individual.

Sue: Yeah, an autonomous being, an individual from the Borg. And I think sort of get a reminder that these were people of other races, of other species before the Borg came to them. And it's not necessarily a choice.

Grace: I think one of the really important things that this episode does in the arc of **TNG**, is introduce this idea of you can, in theory “un-Borg” someone. And we had that with Locutis, but this is the one really where we see it is a process. It is a learning process. It is a healing process. And I think one thing that culturally we're really uncomfortable (with) is the idea that in many conditions, in many states, you can heal. You can recuperate. You can rehabilitate, but it takes a lot of empathy in the people around you. And a lot of patience on other people's parts to help you get there sometimes.

And sometimes being forced to look at a situation where it's like, “if this person had the proper support system they could be in a much better situation.” And I think that Hugh was really a reminder of even if just a few people say, “I could invest some time and energy in helping this person or talking to them,” that there are positive changes that can be made. But empathy can be an investment. You do have to put a lot of personal energy into it sometimes, but that can pay off massively, which, again—and when we're talking in a medical sense—the fact that it can be really hard to care for another person. It can take a lot out of you. But it's one thing to just kind of want to help, it's another to be able to actually help someone.

Jarah: Yep, for sure. This was also another very frequently suggested episode in our social media and mentioned by at least Will, Michelle, and Patricia.

Grace: It's such a good episode you guys.

Sue: What's really fascinating about it is that the character arguing on the side of genocide is Picard.

Grace: Yes.

Sue: Who is typically our very reasonable, diplomatic leader.

Grace: But again, because of his personal trauma here.

Sue: Absolutely. He's been so hurt and so damaged by his experiences, that his feelings are revenge.

Grace: And it isn't usually that we've got the empathy hurdle there that Picard has to be the one to try and bring himself to take the higher ground.

Sue: And yet, he does.

Grace: Yes.

Sue: As bent as he is on destroying the Borg, when he realizes what chance he has, he's able to stop and rethink things and come to a different conclusion.

Jarrah: Yeah, there's a lot of really powerful **Trek** episodes about empathy for someone who was considered your enemy, or on the face of it should seem your enemy. And **Deep Space Nine** episodes came up a lot.

Grace: Oh, yeah. There's a lot to work with there.

Jarrah: Yeah I think **DS9** and **TNG** for sure. So many we will never get to them all. [Grace laughs] But there are at least two that are about the Jem'Hadar that were kind of interesting. One is *Hippocratic Oath*, where Bashir is trying to get them off Ketracel White. And the other one is *The Abandoned*, where they have the Jem'Hadar kid that Odo and O'Brien are sort of trying to "civilize" for lack of a better term. And then, like *Measure of a Man*, Starfleet's like, "No, we need to study him." And they're both interesting and both kind of maybe a bit mixed message-y, especially *The Abandoned*, which ends off with... Kira keeps cautioning Odo like, "This kid was basically bred to be a killing machine," and we do see him become more than that, but under the threat of being taken captive, does kind of become a killing machine again. And Odo at the end basically goes to Kira and was like, "You're right."

So, that's kind of unfortunate, but I think it's important still that in both episodes we see, you know, our heroes, the crew of Starfleet plus Odo, really saying that like, "Our default position is we're going to try and empathize and make things better and work with them to," you know, "break this addiction or work with them to be able to live without killing."

Grace: However, it is really unfortunate that we fall into something that we do see in our regular world. This idea of, "Oh, but they are just killing machines. That's in their nature." Because how many groups of people who are minorities do we already hear that sentiment applied to?

Sue: Yeah.

Grace: It's unfortunate.

Jarrah: Yeah, I mean... and then it's particularly unfortunate that they're proven right.

Grace: Yeah.

Jarrah: Actually, do you mind if I jump to another one?

Grace: Yeah, go for it.

Jarrah: Because I think it may have a bit of the same problem, and maybe an even more direct connection is the **Voyager** episode *Repentance*. And this is one where they rescue a ship that's about to be destroyed. And it has some guards, and a warden, and a bunch of prisoners that are being transported to be executed.

Grace: Oh, yes.

Jarrah: And I think it's an episode—this was suggested by Cheyenne—that has a lot of super interesting moments and it has some really, really nice demonstration of empathy from Seven of Nine towards this convict. And all these convicts are murderers. But upon—and this guy's psychopathic; we see him threatening a guard and he's super creepy—but then upon being treated with some Seven of Nine's nano probes for an injury, he basically grows a conscience and suddenly wants to atone for his crimes. But the justice system on this planet is super messed up.

Grace: Wait wait wait wait wait wait wait wait, guys. [sarcastically] Are you saying that there are people who are incarcerated that could be treated for problems and that that could, in theory, make them be less of criminals?

Jarrah: Yep.

Sue: Yes.

Grace: [drawn out and sarcastically] What?!

Jarrah: And I think that that storyline is quite good, except for, you know, at the end of the day they're hamstrung by the Prime Directive and can't actually save any of these people and it feels awful. Although, at least they all acknowledge it's awful. But Seven of Nine's empathy is super strong in this. She starts out being kind of disinterested, but then really becomes an advocate for him and Janeway, sort of astutely, observes it's partly that, you know, she feels that by allowing him to atone for what he's done, it will help her atone for what she did when she was Borg, because neither of them are responsible, but they have all this guilt.

But then on the other hand Neelix is developing empathy for this guy who is from this species of people. Basically, this guy says he was only convicted because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. And his species is incarcerated at this amount like vastly over their proportion of the population, their sentences are way harsher, sentences are decided by the family instead of an impartial observer. So, it lets this bias play out in sentencing to an even greater extent. And it's a very, very, very clear line being drawn to sentencing of black Americans and other people of color. But then at the end, this guy basically is kind of just written off because this guy—one guy—proved he wasn't a model prisoner because when the force fields went down, this guy chose to attack people, whereas the other guy that Seven of Nine was helping, who reads as white, didn't and instead helps the guards.

Grace: [disappointedly] **Voyager!**

Jarrah: So, I wasn't loving that that part. Yeah, because then they're just like, "Well, we're cool not appealing this guy," even though Neelix had dug up all this evidence that he wasn't treated justly either. But because he panicked, because he thought he was going to die and took advantage of an opportunity in a violent way, it was like, "Well, I guess we're going to be okay with it." So close!

[Sue sighs in disappointment]

Grace: We said he is bad. And then he became bad. So we were right all along!

[Jarrah chuckles]

Sue: How about a happier example?

[laughter]

Grace: Yeah. If I could talk about a topic, more than a specific episode, could I talk about the Maquis for a minute?

Sue and Jarrah: Yeah!

Grace: Because I think it's really interesting as a concept, this idea of, in contrast to Starfleet, this group of people who say, "We are, under most cases, aligned with the ideals of Starfleet. But here a line was crossed and we reserve the right to disagree on it." And I think that that as a concept, says a lot about empathy and how we see Starfleet interact with this group of people who are saying, "No, we don't agree with your decision and we want autonomy because of that." And I think we see some interesting stuff happen with that and just how... the ability to allow different ideas live in a bubble.

Sue: Mmhmm.

Jarrah: Yeah, I mean, I think *Preemptive Strike* is a great episode for that, because you have Ro becoming empathetic to the Maquis and then Picard getting why she does what she does.

Grace: Yeah. It's a thing where you want to see them as the bad guy, but at the same time you're like, "Yeah, they've got a point there. I can see where they're coming from."

Sue: Well, it's also showing us that as Starfleet officers, these issues are not expecting the people that we spent every week with.

Grace: Exactly.

Sue: But with Ro, especially. With Ro's particular background, being Bajoran during the occupation, even if that storyline hadn't really been written yet. She is in a particular place where she gets it, where she sees that the Federation is not always in the right.

Grace: Yeah.

Sue: And the fact that the Maquis are Federation citizens almost gives more weight to the idea that the Federation is not always right, rather than them just having enemies.

Grace: Mmhmm. And I think some of the heavier hitting stuff, empathy wise, is where we're forced into a position to say, "Okay, I see where you would make this decision. It's not the decision I would have made. But I see why you made it," and that's kind of part of why we get *Wrongs Darker than Death or Night* as such an intense episode, where Kira finds out pretty much that her mom was willing to be Gul Dukat's mistress in order to provide food and shelter for her family during the occupation, which is so unpleasant to see Kira realize it, but at the same time, is something she has to accept, "Yeah, she made her choice and it was definitely not the choice I would make, but she made that for her own reasons. And while I don't agree with them I have to respect that."

Jarrah: Although, among a very, very limited range of choices.

Grace: Yeah!

Jarrah: And, you know, the well-being of her family hanging in the balance.

Grace: You can swim up this amusingly named creek, or you can drown in it. Take your pick.

Jarrah: Yeah. Sue, you had a good example. You want to share?

Sue: Yeah, I think with whatever problems they may have as episodes, that we can look to both *The Outcast* and *Rejoined* as sort of teaching as empathy for people... well, I'll just read what Oren wrote. He brought up *Rejoined* and said, "It's an obvious answer, but it was one of the first times I really thought about how ridiculous it is to marginalize people for who they love."

Grace: Yeah.

Sue: And we've had comments about both of these episodes. We've talked about both of these episodes in detail, but it's really true. It's sort of along the lines of *Let That be Your Last Battlefield*, when put in such stark terms. It's really shown how ridiculous some of these judgments are. Whether it's based on race or based on orientation or gender identity, it makes it all seem ludicrous.

Grace: And that's the beauty of using Sci-fi as an analogy for social issues. It doesn't so much simplify as just lay it bare.

Jarrah: Yeah. I mean, we've talked a little bit about *The Outcast* before and on all sides of it, but I think the scene where Soren is pleading in front of the council that's about to decide her fate is just super well written and powerful. And your heart really goes out to her in that scene and feels that it's just tremendously unjust.

Grace: Yeah. And I like that we have these stories here, like with *Let This be Your Last Battlefield* and with *The Outcast*, where they are very much like a campy representation of a real world issue. And it can be very heavy handed. But I know we've had people say that *The Outcast* was one of the first times where they, in a piece of media, had to stop and think, "Oh, these people must feel really forced. That's not okay." We've had a few people tell us that that was kind of a turning point for them, in terms of their worldview. And there has got to be at least a couple of people who are watching **The Original Series** you know as kids who were from a limited background where they saw that on TV and that was kind of their introduction to it.

Sue: Well, yeah we had a comment from Jesse about *Let That be Your Last Battlefield*...

Grace: Yeah.

Sue: ...who said, "It gets a lot of crap for being heavy handed and really dated, but it really did blow my mind as a kid."

Grace: It is definitely dated, but for it's time you have to acknowledge that it was gutsy and pretty important.

Sue: Mmhmm.

Jarrah: Yep.

Grace: And you know what, we don't get to have these conversations until someone starts them.

Jarrah: Yeah, for sure. One episode that we're not going to talk about in-depth, because Andi is not here and we probably are going to do a full episode on it, is *The Inner Light*. But I did want to read this comment from Kelly on our Facebook, just as an addition to the conversation. And Kelly says, "I'm the director of a non-profit that teaches philosophy to kids and teens through literature and pop culture." First of all, cool. And she continues, "We use **Star Trek** often as our text for discussion. The episodes that have so far elicited the most intense empathy are **DS9's** *Far Beyond the Stars* and **TNG's** *The Inner Light*. These may sound like obvious answers, but we were surprised that our kids were more concerned about the gaslighting that goes on in *The Inner Light*, than the bittersweet ending. We had a passionate, productive, and unexpected conversation about the effects of questioning someone's perception of reality."

Grace: Ooo. That's a really good point!

Jarrah: Yeah, so that's really cool. And we'll definitely get into that more in the future and I'm sure we will also talk more about *Far Beyond the Stars*, but also I just think *Far Beyond the Stars*, like you were saying about *Rejoined* and *The Outcast*, even though *Far Beyond the Stars* is set in our past, I think it does a good job prompting empathy with Sisko's character of a black writer who is basically told, "Don't dream too big."

Jarrah and Grace: "Don't get too big for your britches."

Grace: Yeah.

Jarrah: Yeah. And whose reality is denied as well. And it's a really powerful performance and powerful episode.

Grace: The social problem, it is real!

Sue: Yeah in terms of **DS9** sort of "out of the box" episodes, you can throw *Past Tense* in there, too.

Grace: Yep.

Jarrah: Mmhmm.

Sue: It's set in technically our future, but **Deep Space Nine's** past. And it gives us the very stark contrast of, you know, Dax, being a white woman, found on the street and Sisko, a black man, and Bashir, a Middle Eastern man, being found on the street.

Jarrah: For sure. And we did a whole episode on that so, you should check it out if you're a fan of that episode.

Grace: So, we should probably wrap it up for now.

Jarrah: Yeah, I mean maybe one teeny, teeny, little thing is, I technically wasn't correct when I said there's only one **Enterprise** episode. The other one was a very small mention of the episode *Horizon* and Jacob just said, "Honorable mention to T'Pol's **Frankenstein** subplot," which is like, if there's a B plot I guess it's the B plot [Grace laughs], but it's a very small part of this episode. But it is awesome and it's how they keep pressuring her to go to movie night. And eventually she goes and it's **Frankenstein** and she comes out being like, "Of course," you know, "it's awful how the monster was so oppressed."

Grace: Yeah!

Jarrah: And everyone just rolls their eyes at her, but she's totally right!

Grace: She's totally right! Yeah!

Sue: That's the point!

Jarrah: I know I was like, "How are they missing the point?"

[Sue laughs]

Grace: T'Pol deserved better.

Jarrah: [sighs in amusement] I have empathy for T'Pol. [giggles]

Grace: As do I.

Sue: I want to talk about the Vidiins in **Voyager**. And this was also brought up by Victoria on our Facebook page and well, I'll just read what she says. "Specifically for examples of how widespread suffering and death can erode empathy for others in those who are suffering.—"

Grace: Mmhmm, yeah!

Sue: "—Whether that comes from basic survival instinct or what. People who have lived in times of war or other severe hardship have talked about becoming capable of things they later thought monstrous."

Grace: Yes.

Jarrah: Mmhmm, and I think through Danara Pel we see empathy on both sides, which is really cool, and I'm a pretty big fan of her character.

Sue: Mmhmm.

Grace: Yeah!

Sue: And I think that just goes to show how much having that sense of empathy is worth and how much better things can be when you use it for people, you know?

Grace: Right.

Jarrah: Use it *with* people.

Sue: Yes. [laughs] Thank you.

Grace: [laughs] We'll just wrap that up for now then. There's a lot to still talk about right here. Remember, the conversations can continue on our Twitter and Facebook feeds. Shoot us a question if you got one or a comment, if you want our input.

Jarrah: That's crew@womenatwarp.com.

Sue: [Facebook.com/womenatwarp](https://www.facebook.com/womenatwarp), Twitter @womenatwarp, Instagram @womenatwarp.

Grace: And individually speaking, where can people find you online, Jarrah?

Jarrah: You can find me on Twitter @JarrahPenguin.

Grace: What about you, Sue?

Sue: You can find me on Twitter @spaltor.

Grace: And I'm Grace, again, you can find me on Twitter @bonecrusherjenk.

Sue: And for more from the Roddenberry Podcast Network visit <http://podcasts.rodnenberry.com>.

Grace: [whispers dramatically] Empathy!

Sue: Thanks so much for listening!

[WAW outro plays]

[Voiceover] The Roddenberry Podcast Network: podcasts.rodnenberry.com.